

Kootenai River Habitat Restoration at Bonners Ferry Project Final Environmental Assessment

Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-1973
May 2015

This document is the final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Kootenai River Habitat Restoration at Bonners Ferry Project. This document has been prepared as an abbreviated final EA because there have been no substantial changes to the proposed action, alternatives, or environmental analysis presented in the draft EA. This abbreviated final EA provides comments received on the draft EA and Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) responses to the comments. This final EA should be used as a companion document to the draft EA (DOE/EA-1973, dated February 2015), which contains the full text describing the project, its potential environmental impacts, and mitigation measures to reduce impacts. For readers of this final EA who do not already have a copy of the draft EA, it is available on the project webpage at <https://www.bpa.gov/goto/BonnersFerry>.

Summary

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to fund the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho (Tribe) to restore portions of the Kootenai River in Bonners Ferry, Idaho. The Kootenai River Habitat Restoration at Bonners Ferry project would involve installing structures on the river banks and excavating areas in the river to create deeper pools of water, as well as developing and enhancing islands to be planted with native riparian vegetation. The project would improve Kootenai River habitat to benefit Endangered Species Act-listed Kootenai River White Sturgeon and other native fish, would complement other restoration on the Kootenai River, and would help mitigate for effects caused by Libby Dam located upstream in Montana.

Draft EA Comment Period

In order to solicit comments on the draft EA, BPA mailed the EA, or notification of its availability, to over 300 interested or affected governments, agencies, tribes, organizations, and individuals. The comment period ran from February 3, 2015 to March 5, 2015.

In addition, BPA posted the EA on the project website, ran an advertisement in the local newspaper, and held a public meeting. The public meeting was held on February 18, 2015 at the Boundary County Extension Office in Bonners Ferry—six people attended the meeting. Comments were received during the meeting and three people submitted written comments through the project website. All comments and BPA's responses are included in this final EA; none of the public comments necessitated changes to the EA.

Comments and Responses

Comments received during the public meeting included questions about how the project would be constructed, what portions of the project would be constructed in 2015 and 2016, and general comments of interest and support for the Tribe's efforts to restore Kootenai River white sturgeon and burbot to the Kootenai River; these comments were addressed during the public meeting and did not necessitate further written responses in this document. Comments received in writing were assigned an identifying number corresponding to the order in which the comment was

received. Table 1 provides the comment number and the associated author and affiliation. The comments are reprinted in full, followed by BPA’s written response.

Table 1. Draft EA Comment Submittals

Comment Number	Comment Author / Affiliation
KRHRBF14 0001	Citizen 1/Public
KRHRBF14 0002	Dave Lefebvre/Public
KRHRBF14 0003	Brad Smith/Idaho Conservation League

Comment KRHRBF14 0001 Citizen 1

Have the impact and risk factors been identified and/or evaluated concerning the Cabinet Mountain Water System intakes just upriver from Bonners Ferry? What about potential long term impacts such as changing river channel/s, sediment issues, etc... What about increased debris from failing/compromised pool forming structures and substrate Enhancement Cluster material/s.

Response to Comment KRHRBF14 0001 Citizen 1

Thank you for your comment. Potential impacts to the water intake structure have been considered. As described in Section 3.12.1 of the EA, the City of Bonners Ferry has a back-up water intake structure located within the Bonners Ferry Island project area of the Kootenai River, just upstream of the Kootenai River Inn. The City’s main drinking water source is Myrtle Creek and the Kootenai River intake is a backup water source. A hydrologic analysis was conducted to analyze potential effects on City utilities, including the back-up water intake. As described in Section 3.12.2 of the EA, the proposed restoration project would not affect the City’s ability to draw water from Kootenai River backup water intake structure and depth of flow over the intake would not change. The restoration activities are intended, among other things, to help stabilize existing river banks, including banks just upstream from the intake structure, that are subject to erosion. As described in Section 3.2.2 of the EA, though sedimentation may be more than typical background levels during construction activities, over the long-term with bank stabilization, turbidity in the project area could lessen.

The pool forming structures would be designed to withstand the maximum flows allowed in the Kootenai River by operations at Libby Dam. It would be expected that if there were a failure of a pool forming structure, the materials that would break loose would be similar to natural debris (logs, branches, rocks) typically carried through the river during high flows. The intake is rarely used and is protected with a perimeter of sheet piling. The City has reviewed the analysis of potential effects on the intake structure and did not identify any issues. The City also expressed that they felt the proposed project would have an overall beneficial impact to the river for both fish habitat and the flood control infrastructure. Both the City and Tribe would monitor the area for any unanticipated changes once construction is complete.

The Cabinet Mountain Water District also provides drinking water in the area through the use of wells located about 800 feet south of the Kootenai River and about 3 miles east of Bonners Ferry. The wells are not located in the potentially affected area of the proposed restoration activities and would not be impacted by the project.

Comment KRHRBF14 0002 Lefebvre

First off, I'd like to applaud that folks that have taken the initiative to implement these improvements to these areas on the Kootenai. Clearly it's a long, arduous process to get things done, so good on you all for your persistence. My first challenge to the group would be to include a lot more discussion about cost to the taxpayer of this project, specifically on a per acre basis. (Granted, I only did a five-minute scan of the text in the email I received, so maybe this was included and I missed the cost discussion.) All too often I've seen similar projects that seemingly have an unnecessarily large price tag and impact too few acres; making me perceive them as 'feel good projects.' Secondly, how will you know if the project was effective? What measurement will you be looking at 5, 10, 20 years later to show that you directly impacted something (ex. # sturgeon). Have similar projects been instituted in other places and what was the clear impact? I simply want to ensure that we are getting the most out of taxpayer dollars and running these projects like those of us that work in the private sector would. Thank you and good luck! Regards, Dave Lefebvre

Response to Comment KRHRBF14 0002 Lefebvre

BPA is directed by the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act of 1980 (Northwest Power Act) to implement protection, mitigation, and enhancement actions for fish and wildlife, as well as their habitats, affected by the construction and operation of the Federal Columbia River Power System (FCRPS) (16 United States Code [USC] 839b(h)(10)(A)). To assist in accomplishing this, the Northwest Power Act requires BPA to fund fish and wildlife protection, mitigation, and enhancement actions consistent with the Northwest Power and Conservation Council's (Council) Fish and Wildlife Program. Under this program, the Council makes recommendations to BPA about which projects to fund.

BPA's funding for projects, such as the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration at Bonners Ferry project, does not come from tax revenues. Instead, it uses the Bonneville Fund, the repository of the funds the agency collects from the rates it charges for providing transmission and power marketing services to its utility customers. . Costs are available to review on Columbia Basin Fish, BPA's project management and information sharing database. Here is a link to this project on Columbia Basin Fish: <http://www.cbfish.org/Project.mvc/Display/2002-002-00>.

The Council recommended that BPA fund the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration Program (KRHRP), which includes multiple restoration projects (of which the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration at Bonners Ferry is one) designed to restore habitat conditions that support all life stages of Kootenai River white sturgeon and other native fish. BPA expects this project and the other KRHRP projects to contribute to the recovery of Kootenai white sturgeon in the Kootenai River as well as provide benefits to other native fish and wildlife species that inhabit the area.

The Tribe conducts effectiveness monitoring to measure the physical response and performance of the projects they implement, including this project. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) conducts monitoring of native fish populations to determine how each species is responding to the restoration projects the Tribe has implemented. IDFG and the Tribe have tagged over 100 adult Kootenai white sturgeon so their movements can be tracked within the

river. Once this project is implemented IDFG would continue their monitoring to include the Bonners Ferry Islands and Straight Reach project areas to determine how this restoration project, in conjunction with previous projects, has altered the movements of adult sturgeon and burbot.

Because of their long lifespan, it is still too early to tell how the overall white sturgeon population has responded to habitat restoration actions to date. Additional monitoring by the Tribe in collaboration with University of Idaho has shown that kokanee have moved into the reconstructed side channels completed in 2013 during the fall spawning period. Burbot have been captured by IDFG in spawning condition on the substrate enhancement projects and there have been numerous reports of improved trout fishing in the braided reach above Bonners Ferry. Thus, monitoring results suggest increased fish presence in previously restored areas.

IDFG also produces an annual report summarizing its monitoring findings. The latest report (2013/14) can be found on the BPA's Columbia Basin Fish and Wildlife Program website, <http://www.cbfish.org/Contract.mvc/Summary/68393>.

Comment KRHRBF14 0003 Smith

Subject: Kootenai River Habitat Restoration at Bonners Ferry

Dear Mr. Rose:

I am writing on behalf of the Idaho Conservation League to support the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho's proposed river habitat restoration project located at Bonners Ferry, Idaho. Since 1973, the Idaho Conservation League has been Idaho's voice for clean water, clean air and wilderness—values that are the foundation for Idaho's extraordinary quality of life. The Idaho Conservation League works to protect these values through public education, outreach, advocacy and policy development. As Idaho's largest state-based conservation organization, we represent over 25,000 supporters, many of whom have a deep personal interest in protecting human health and the environment.

The Tribe has proven that it can successfully implement aquatic habitat restoration projects in the Kootenai River Drainage, which benefit white sturgeon and burbot. The Tribe's fisheries program compliments other restoration work in the basin. Combined, these efforts are contributing to the restoration of aquatic and terrestrial habitat from ridge top to ridge top. We look forward to the implementation of this project.

Sincerely,

Brad Smith

Conservation Associate

Response to Comment KRHRBF14 0003 Smith

Thank you for your comment. We recognize and appreciate your support of the Kootenai River Habitat Restoration at Bonners Ferry Project.